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ABSTRACT

One method of adapting a social studies curriculum project to meet the specific needs of a school is demonstrated in this document. The curriculum package used is People and Technology developed by the Educational Development Center (EDC). The first part of the document gives an overview of the original curriculum product as developed by EDC, including its content focus, objectives, and teaching strategies. The second section illustrates how the curriculum is adapted for use in a New Jersey school. An interdisciplinary approach of social studies and language arts through a team teaching situation is used. The content of People and Technology provides a good vehicle for teaching language arts skills; inturn, the language arts activities help to reinforce social studies concepts. One major adaptation of the program is the addition of four study units which the teachers feel are necessary to incorporate concepts not included in the basic curriculum. The key to the success of the curriculum adaptation is continual revision, providing a better curriculum suited to the needs of individual students, and a fresh classroom experience each year for teachers. (Author/JR)

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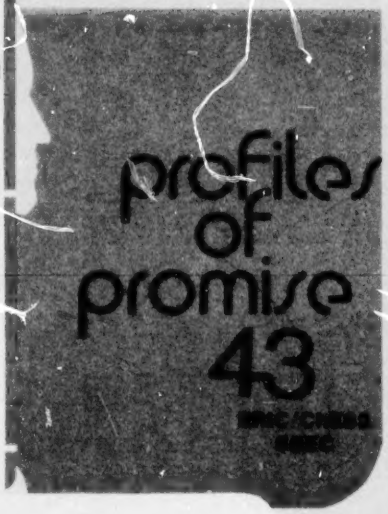

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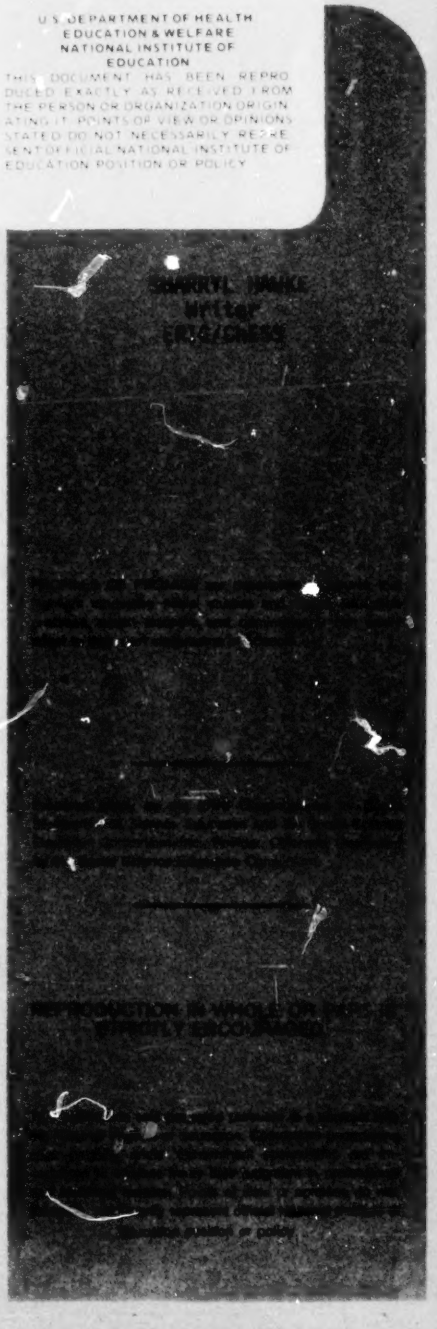

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Adapting a Curriculum Project

The major social studies curriculum projects introduced during the past few years have become an important part of many schools' curriculum. Geography in an Urban Age, Man: A Course of Study, Patterns of Human History, and Our Working World *are only a few examples of the projects currently being used in hundreds of classes. Some teachers use the packages just as they come from the publishers and find the materials both appropriate and complete. Other teachers choose to use the published version only as a beginning. They start with the original materials but modify, adapt, and add activities to suit their special situations and needs.*

An example of one school which is using, and adapting, a major curriculum project is West Windsor-Plainsboro High School, Princeton Junction, New Jersey. The 7-12 level school first introduced People and Technology, a product of the Education Development Center, Inc., into the seventh-grade curriculum in 1973. This year the staff has modified and added to the program in several substantial ways, and they have plans for more adaptations next year. The process of modification provides an interesting illustration of ways a curriculum package can be "personalized" for a specific school.

PEOPLE AND TECHNOLOGY: THE ORIGINAL PACKAGE

People and Technology, as conceived by the Education Development Center (EDC), is a program for students in the middle grades that "explores the relationship between technology and society." It is designed primarily as a social studies course but provides an interdisciplinary approach to learning. The variety and format of the program is constructed to appeal to students in many school settings; activities are flexible enough for use by students with a wide range of abilities.

The content focus of *People and Technology*--the relationship between society and technological systems--is an important social science concept but one which is seldom explored at the middle school level. Yet the program developers feel the concept is especially relevant for middle school students who are "just starting to investigate the world that lies beyond their families and schools and to think seriously about the various roles, models, and ideas that the adult world has to offer."

People and Technology integrates three main learning strategies: manipulative activity, case study, and community exploration. The manipulative activities help students develop skill in using a variety of tools, materials, and artifacts. Case studies enable students to explore examples of important technological systems, and community exploration helps the youngsters draw analogies between questions and concepts introduced in the classroom and their own immediate world.

Five basic questions guide student inquiry throughout the program:

- What is technology?
- How does technology affect society?
- How can we make technology more harmonious with nature?
- How can we use technology to create a more humane way of life?

These questions are examined in the three available units of study comprising *People and Technology*. Units I, II, and IV are described below. Unit III has not yet been released by EDC.

Tooling Up: An Introduction to the Program opens with a series of activities designed to stimulate students' thinking about tools and people. By examining tools brought from home, students begin to understand the function of tools in the development of society and to recognize the processes used in the invention and implementation of tools.

Unit I: Using Tools is commonly called the "whaling" unit, because the primary focus of the unit is a case study of a highly developed craft technology that predated the industrial revolution--the whaling industry of nineteenth-century Nantucket. Through a detailed study of the technological system--which includes building a whaling boat replica--students examine not only how the system functioned but more abstractly how the system affected the people of Nantucket and their environment. The unit concludes with an examination of today's whaling industry and how it relates to our present environmental situation.

Unit II: Acquiring Energy builds on the whaling unit by having students consider the impact of a large-scale, irreversible intervention into the natural environment. The example studied is the damming of the Volta River in Ghana, which was undertaken to provide new energy sources. Students learn how this technological intervention affected the residents of the Volta River area. They also construct a scale model of the dam in order to understand the technological requirements of dam building. To relate the Volta Dam implications to their own community, students explore the energy sources in their geographical area and examine the uses, and abuses, of these sources.

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Unit IV: Communicating focuses on human beings as communicators and on the technology of communication. Students examine the distinctive communication abilities possessed by humans and the industry which has developed from these abilities. The photography of Gordon Parks, the black photographer who used his special skills to express and fight for his own humanity, is the subject of a case study. In studying Parks' photography, students develop a better understanding of the visual world of communication, explore the technology of photography, and learn to use common communication tools such as cameras and video-tape equipment. The general goal of the unit is to increase the "communications literacy" of students in a modern world.

The *People and Technology* package is comprised of many components. There are filmstrips, student reading materials in booklet forms, and activity books. EDC has also produced kits containing the necessary materials for constructing the models of the whaling ship and dam and for completing other suggested manipulative activities. Teachers' guidebooks accompany the student materials.

The publishers hope that, after completing the program, "students will have come to see the need to direct the use of technology in ways that are beneficial to humankind, and will have learned some ways in which they can act in support of their views."

WEST WINDSOR-PLAINSBORO ADAPTATIONS

When the West Windsor-Plainsboro staff chose *People and Technology* as their curriculum base, they decided the course should be an interdisciplinary social studies-language arts course. Two social studies teachers, Dorothy Plaganis and David DeVido, and two language arts teachers, Kathleen Christiansen and Carolyn Magee, were selected for the teaching team and assigned to the same open-space area of the school. Two consecutive 45-minute blocks of time were allowed in the schedule for the course. During the summer preceding the introduction of the course into the curriculum, the two social studies teachers attended a two-day workshop to learn the content and strategies suggested by EDC for teaching the course.

During the first year the team adhered fairly closely to the program outlined by EDC. By following the established program, the teachers were able to work out the intricacies of team teaching and to get a firm grasp on the concepts and activities included in the course.

Although the team teachers were focusing on social studies and language arts, they dovetailed skills, concepts, and content as much as possible. In practice, the teachers found the social studies content of *People and Technology* provided a good vehicle for teaching language arts skills and the language arts activities helped to reinforce social studies concepts.

The teacher team decides as a group what to teach each day and how the content will be approached. In a typical day, teachers might begin by giving general directions and information to all 60 to 65 students. Students then divide into small groups with individual teachers assigned to work with these smaller units. At the end of the two 45-minute sessions, students might be brought back together for a debriefing session. Some classes are conducted solely by the social studies teachers and other classes solely by the language arts teachers.

People and Technology students receive two grades for the course. Their social studies grades are assigned by the social studies teachers and their language arts grades by the language arts teachers. Letter grades are used.

The *People and Technology* team teachers are pleased with the results of their teaming approach and feel it has been largely responsible for the success of the program. "Teaming allows the choice of individual student projects, strength in teaching familiar subject areas, and individualized instruction coordinated with large group activity," states one teacher. Another adds, "Two heads are better than one in planning joint projects."

Based on both the successes and the shortcomings of the program's first year, the *People and Technology* team developed a number of content and activity modifications for the second year. One major adaptation was the addition of four study units which teachers felt were necessary to incorporate concepts not included in the basic curriculum.

Two units, *Inner Environment* and *Outer Environment*, were added to the beginning of the course, preceding *Tooling Up*. The objective in *Inner Environment* is to help the students understand the relationships between themselves and their family/peer groups. Through a series of readings and activities, students focus on themselves as individuals and as members of a wider group. They are also introduced to the open-school setting and to research and writing methods they will need in later units.

Scenes from People and Technology classes

Class discussion in the 7th grade open-space area

Guest speaker from Plymouth Plantat

Minutes in history dramatization--
"Trial of a Horse Thief"

Project preparation in Colonial Crafts

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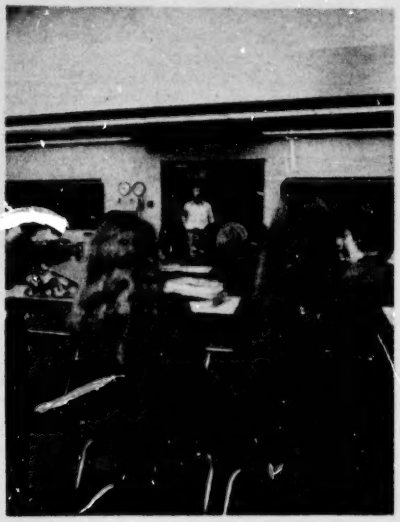

on

Small group work

acher assisting students with research projects

In the second unit, *Outer Environment*, students deal with the interdependence between themselves and their environment. While the objective in the first unit is for students to understand themselves in their environment, in this unit students are encouraged to explore how all people and the environment are interrelated in time and space. Students also develop additional research and reporting skills necessary for the remainder of the course.

The seventh grade social studies/language arts team felt *Inner Environment* and *Outer Environment* were necessary as beginning units, because the seventh graders taking *People and Technology* the first year did not develop sufficient background to fully understand the concepts of the *Using Tools, Acquiring Energy,* and *Communicating* units. By spending six weeks at the first of the year exploring the relationship between self, others, and the environment, teachers believed students would be better prepared to deal with the later units.

A third unit was added to the course this year to provide students with more insight into a simple man/tool relationship. Using the *Netsilik Eskimo* unit from the curriculum project, *Man: A Course of Study* (also an EDC product), the students examine how the Netsilik Eskimo relate to their environment and how their simple technology is a function of this relationship. *Man: A Course of Study* is not currently used in the elementary school from which West Windsor-Plainsboro students come, so the material is new to students.

A fourth unit, *Colonial Craftsmanship*, has also been added this year to emphasize the upcoming national Bicentennial activities. The unit is designed to recreate the atmosphere of the eighteenth-century relationship between man, tool, and work. Students simulate the experience through achievement-oriented tasks, which help them develop a greater appreciation for the effect this relationship had on the lives of eighteenth-century people. Students dramatize minutes in history, write fictitious biographies, examine eighteenth-century tools, visit historic sites and produce an object related to the 1700s. According to their individual interests and abilities, students have engaged in activities such as quilting, planting an herb garden, pressing cider, marbelizing paper, binding books, dipping candles, spinning and dyeing wool, and making objects like quill pens, tin lamps, canvas buckets, water wheels, and brooms.

In addition to the units which have been added to the original *People and Technology* package, the social studies/language arts team has incorporated some special activities into the course. For example, in *Acquiring Energy* students learned to make pottery and fire it in pits heated with cow dung. With advice from a mason, the seventh graders built scale model cement homes. As part of the *Communicating* unit, students constructed a sound-proof studio from egg cartons and used the studio to produce video-taped performances of original plays and dramatic skits.

Students have responded positively in both years in which *People and Technology* was used. The middle schoolers seem to enjoy the activity involved in the course and the challenge of using their imagination to make hand tools. Students also find their work with other students in group situations a valuable experience.

What do students learn from the course? One youngster declares firmly, "I can't think of anything we need to learn that we didn't." While other students may not believe the course is quite so comprehensive, most do agree that it is worthwhile and enjoyable. At the conclusion of the course a student wrote, "I feel that this year I learned about the same as I have learned all the other years of school, but this year it seemed like more fun."

PEOPLE AND TECHNOLOGY: A CONTINUALLY CHANGING COURSE

In the future, the social studies/language arts team plans to use less of the original *People and Technology* package and more of their own adaptations. From classroom experience, teachers have a feel for what works with their students and what doesn't. Their goal is to build on the successful aspects of the program and to modify the less popular or less effective units; the modifications may include dropping certain activities, adding units, or revamping approaches. Teachers believe the end result will be an even stronger program.

Alan Markowitz, social studies coordinator for the West Windsor-Plainsboro Senior High School, is pleased with the way in which the *People and Technology* program has evolved at the school. For other schools who are considering using a curriculum package such as *People and Technology*, he feels the experience at West Windsor-Plainsboro has shown that it is helpful to begin by using the package in its original form. Once teachers are familiar with the project content, they can begin to make adaptations and in time the original package may be substantially modified.

The teachers on the social studies/language arts team agree that continual adaptation of a curriculum package such as *People and Technology* is vital to a successful program. But, as social studies teacher Dorothy Plaganis points out, "...continuing teacher revision of curriculum and activities requires extra time and research." Teachers who undertake such modifications should be prepared for some after school work. The reward of this extra effort is a curriculum better suited to the needs of individual students and a fresh classroom experience each year for teachers.

For further information, write:

Dorothy Plaganis
West Windsor-Plainsboro Senior High School
Princeton Junction, New Jersey 08550

ERIC DOCUMENTS

A search of the ERIC system did not turn up any documents specifically related to the topic of adapting published curriculum materials to fit the needs of a school. If you have been engaged in such adaptation efforts, we would be interested in receiving reports from your project. Send to: ERIC/ChESS, 855 Broadway, Boulder, Colorado 80302, Attention: Frances Haley.

The following ERIC documents are related to curriculum planning in general, and to the role of the teacher in curriculum planning.

ED 090 072 - *Some Implications of National Assessment Findings for Curriculum Development in the Social Studies.* By Bob L. Taylor. 13 pp. MF-$.75, HC-$1.50, plus postage. Taylor outlines needed changes in the curriculum which are indicated by the results of the National Assessment findings. Among them are included the fostering of total student development, creation of a self-actualizing situation for teachers, use of informal learning environments, and the opportunity for critical thinking and conflict resolution experiences.

ED 083 241 - *The Teacher as Choice Maker in Curriculum Development: A Case Study.* By F. Michael Connelly and Barbara Dienes. 17 pp. MF-$.75, HC-$1.50, plus postage. This paper discusses the role of the teacher in curriculum development, including consideration of the purposes of development, the process of decision making and deliberation, and the use of data for decision making.

If you know of other significant practices write a one page description, including the name and address of a person to contact for further information, and send to:

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